BOOK NOTES

We have already received about 100 orders for Carl Ketcherside's autobiography entitled *Pilgrimage of Joy*. College Press, the publisher, informs us that because of unexpected delays the book will not be ready until late this year. If you have sent money and reserved a copy, be assured that we have not forgotten you, and that you will receive your copy as soon as they are available. We regret the delay, but it will be a nicer book, for they have decided to put it all in new type. If you intend to own a copy, it is just as well to go on and place your order with us at $15.00 postpaid.

We have a fresh supply of Edward Fudge's *The Fire That Consumes,* a biblical and historical study of the doctrine of final punishment. If you have always believed the traditional interpretation that the punishment of eternal fire is unending, this book will cause you to have second thoughts. The book has been widely acclaimed as not only soundly biblical, but as fair, reverent, and persuasive. $21.00 postpaid.

I am presently reading with keen interest *The Cruciform Church* by Leonard Allen of ACU, which is subtitled "Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World." It is authored especially for Church of Christ folk, and it challenges us to find the roots of our faith in the Cross. It does this in part by questioning our traditional interpretations and inviting us to view the Bible more critically while no less reverently. His chapters on the familiar world of the Bible and the strange world of the Bible are especially informative. It is reasonable, responsible, resourceful. Coming from one of our own and calling for renewal from within, I find this book very encouraging. I urge you to study it. We will send you a copy for $12.95 postpaid.

William Barclay's *Spiritual Autobiography* is delightful reading to anyone who appreciates the late Scottish divine. It is a small book but it is like a personal visit with him. $2.95 postpaid.

We get many encouraging comments about *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett, one of the most interesting being the Lutheran seminary student who happened to read the book and was so impressed with the Stone-Campbell plea for unity that she left the Lutherans and joined us, and is presently enrolled at Emmanuel School of Religion. While I did not write the book with such as that in mind, I have no objection to it happening — if we only had that same passion for unity that our founding fathers had! Whether it converts you or not, I believe you will profit from reading it. $21.95 postpaid, a bargain for a book with over 700 pages and lots of photographs.

Subscription Rates: $6.00 per year or two years for $10.00. In clubs of three or more (sent to separate addresses by us) $4.00 per name per year. Outside the U. S. A. $8.00 per year.

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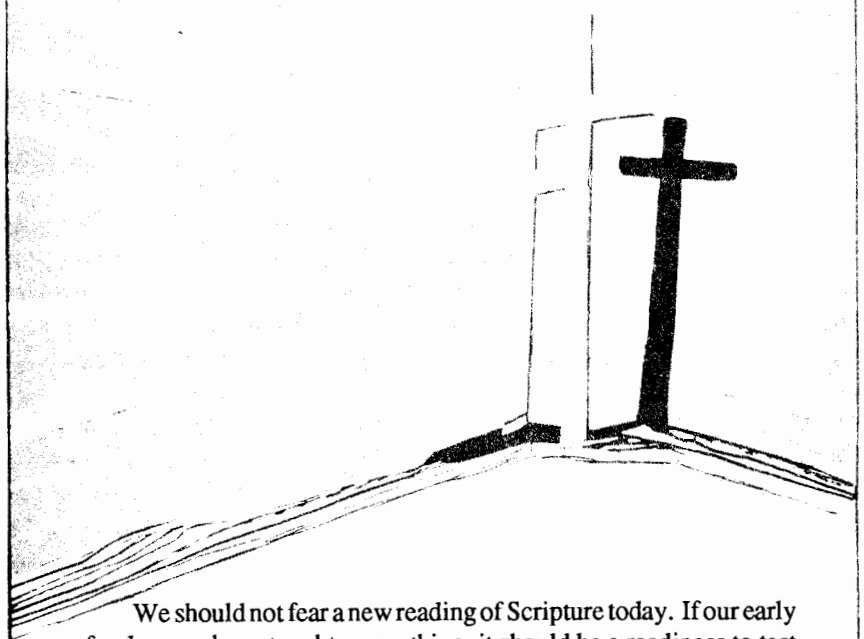

We should not fear a new reading of Scripture today. If our early forebearers have taught us anything, it should be a readiness to test our traditions and read the Bible afresh, for that has been the highest ideal of this restoration movement. -- C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church,* p. 74

In This Issue:

Does the Church Have a Pattern?
John Bunyan: Captive of the Word

Volume 32. No. 4 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **April, 1990**

The Hope of the Believer...No. 14

ARE YOU TIRED OF TRYING TO GO TO HEAVEN?

An entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. — 2 Pet. 1:11

Are you among those who are "trying hard to go to heaven"? I was in that company for a large part of my life, but I grew weary of the struggle and sought something better. I don't believe we go to heaven by trying harder and harder, day after day, year after year. If it is a matter of how hard I try, how hard does that have to be? What grade do I have to make?

I was recently reminded of this problem when I sat with a dozen or so in a Bible study at a Church of Christ. When the teacher was a bit flustered over a problem that came up, he said to the others, "I am trying as hard to go to heaven as you are." I found myself feeling sorry for him — and for us all. I eased up to him afterward and quietly suggested to him that none of us is likely to make it to heaven if it depends on how hard we try. He seemed puzzled. I reminded him of the promises of abundant grace, abundant mercy, and an abundant entrance into heaven. And sometimes, as in 1 Tim. 1:11, we are even promised "an exceedingly abundant grace." We are saved by grace, not by trying, I assured him.

He then revealed what I think is a problem for many of us: "But we have to try, we have to make an effort." Yes, of course, I assured him, but it isn't by trying that we are saved. We try, or make an effort, or do good works because we are saved, not to be saved. "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God," I pointed out, quoting Eph. 2:8.

He readily granted that we are saved by God's grace, but "We have to do our part," he insisted. God's part plus our part equals salvation is the way the math goes. It is a hard way to live and an impossible way to be saved.

This notion that we take up where God's grace leaves off has been our undoing. This is why we have no real assurance of being saved or of going to heaven. We do not question God's part. It is our part that keeps us in doubt, so we keep trying harder and harder. When I asked the dear brother if he thought he worked at it hard enough to go to heaven, he said, "I hope so!" I told him that was an awful way to have to live and that our Lord has delivered us from such uncertainty with such promises as, "Come unto me, all of you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

There was the lowly publican, I recalled for him, who humbly prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" He didn't say anything to God about how hard he had been trying, or how good he was, or how he deserved it because of his works. It was the self-righteous Pharisee that prayed that way.

Moreover, Jesus said of the publican, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other" (Lk. 18:14). What justified or saved him? Not his works. Not his goodness. Nor how hard he tried. It was by God's mercy, which he received freely as a gift when he asked for it.

It is the same with us. We cannot lay enough gold and silver at God's throne to buy it. We can never be good enough to deserve it. We cannot work enough to earn it. We cannot try hard enough to attain it. We cannot muster enough power to wrest it from him. It is ours only as a free gift. Paul said it beautifully in Tit. 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

That passage says it all. It might be clear enough to us that we are not saved by our own selfish works, but here we are to see that we are not even saved by righteous works — not ours at least. God has done the "work" through Jesus Christ on our behalf. It is by God's mercy that we are saved, and this happened because "the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared" (verse 4).

God has done it all for us. Even baptism, which almost certainly is what "the washing of generation" refers to, is God's work. In baptism he is doing something with us and for us. We are "washed" by the regenerating power of God's love, which is typified in baptism. We are "renewed" by the power of the Holy Spirit. In all this we are not acting but are being acted upon. We accept his free gift of salvation by yielding to his will in allowing baptism to happen to us. And, according to Philip. 2:12, even the yielding is God's work in us: "It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

When we really believe that our salvation is God's work in us, and not our own, only then will we have assurance of salvation and heaven. This is what gives us joy. We are for the most part a joyless people because we have no assurance that we are saved. We hope we are and we try hard, but we cannot be sure. There is no "exceeding joy" in religion like that.

But we have to be faithful, we are told, and this puts us back on the treadmill of "trying hard" to be saved. Yes, of course, we must be faithful, but this can't mean being right about everything by dotting all the i's and crossing all the t's. We are faithful, not by rule keeping or by our good works, but by trusting in him who is "able to keep you from falling, and to present you blameless before His glorious presence with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). I could fall, yes, but that will not happen because I trust him who is able to keep it from happening. I am not able, but God is able, and he will keep me. That is why I have joy. I trust in the Lord to keep me and not myself.

A large part of the problem is that we have made the New Testament into a code of case law, and our preachers are the lawyers. They tell us that if we are "faithful members of the church," which means to attend the services regularly, perform "the five acts of worship," place ourselves under the authority of the elders, and do other

such "church" things, then we might make it to heaven, maybe. That is what "faithful" is made to mean. All this is the Sunday morning rip-off. No wonder we are a people scared to live and afraid to die!

We have been sold a bill of goods and the price is more than we can pay, and that is that we are "under New Testament law" like Israel was under the law of Moses. We have had laid on us the notion that God nailed one law to the Cross and turned around and gave us another one through Christ. But we cannot be saved through a law of Christ anymore than a law of Moses. Has not the apostle Paul made it clear that "If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Gal. 2:20). Christ saved us by dying for us, not by giving us a better or a higher law. That is what grace means, and that is why Paul says in the same passage, "I do not set aside the grace of God."

But that is exactly what we do when try to be saved by any law or by good works or by doing "our part" — we make void the grace of God. If we could but believe the great message of Rom. 3:24: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Or Philip. 3:9: "and be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith."

This is why Paul could joyously say, "I know and I am fully persuaded" (2 Tim. 1:12), and why John could assure his readers with "We know that we abide in him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit" (1 Jn. 4:13). This is our hope and our joy.

When we are justified by grace through faith we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10). When we do such works — gladly and not simply out of duty — it is evidence of what God has done for us and is doing through us, for faith without works is dead being alone. We are "justified by works" (Jas. 2:24) in that our works show that we are indeed saved by his free grace. This is our confidence. — *the Editor*

NEW SUBSCRIPTION RATES

This is to announce a modest increase in our subscription rates, the first in nine years, effective immediately. Single subscriptions are now $6.00 a year or two years for $10.00. In clubs of three or more (mailed by us to separate addresses) new or renewal, including your own, the rate is now $4.00 per name per year. For the first time in 37 years we are forced by higher foreign postal rates to charge a higher price for all addresses outside the United States, which is now $8.00 a year. While these new rates take effect immediately, they do not affect the subscriptions or renewals received up to now, which will be processed at the old rates.

A VISIT WITH MESSIANIC JEWS

When on a recent Sabbath (Saturday) I visited the Baruch Hashem (Bless His Name) Congregation in Dallas, I was reminded of a serious problem in the primitive community of believers. In the first century the integrity of the gospel was threatened when some leading Jewish believers demanded that the new Gentile believers be circumcised according to the law of Moses before they be received into the Messianic community. This was the issue that called for the first ecumenical conference in Jerusalem in about 50 A.D. (Acts 15). It was a question of whether a Gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian. While it was supposedly answered in the negative in that conference, it was a problem that would not go away, for the so-called "Judaizers" continued to harass the apostle Paul in his mission to the Gentiles.

My visit to the Messianic synagogue reminded me that today we have something of the same problem in reverse: When a Jew turns to Jesus it is supposed she will become a Gentile when she becomes a "Christian," for it is presumed she will become a Roman Catholic, a Baptist, or a member of the Church of Christ. I put "Christian" in quotes in this context because this name has had such a Gentile connotation to the Jews through the centuries that they think of one becoming a non-Jew when she becomes a "Christian." In Israel, for instance, believing Jews cannot become citizens on the basis of the Law of Return, which allows citizenship to any child of a Jewish mother, for the supreme court has ruled that if one is a "Christian" she cannot be a Jew, even if born of a Jewish mother.

One notices that the "Christian" synagogue in Dallas is hardly recognizable as a "Christian church." Neither of those terms is ever used. They are Messianic Jews, not "Christians;" they are a congregation (or Keneset in Hebrew), not a "church." It is presided over by a rabbi, not a minister or a pastor. It gathers to worship God on the Sabbath, not Sunday. They are believers in Yeshua, not Jesus. The Scriptures are read in Hebrew; the blessings and congregational responses are in Hebrew. The men wear skullcaps as they do in synagogues. There is no collection as in Gentile churches; gifts may be deposited in a tray as one enters or leaves, as in a synagogue. The psalms and hymns are taken from Scripture or are otherwise of Jewish authorship and are sung or chanted in both Hebrew and English.

The great hymns of Gentile churches are not used. Hymnals are not used. An overhead projector reflects the words on the wall, sometimes Hebrew, sometimes English, often both. The congregation stands to sing and to listen to Scripture. At one point in the service I stood with the congregation for a full 20 minutes, singing and praising God, many with their hands lifted up. The rabbi unrolled a scroll of the Torah and read in Hebrew. Once rolled back and replaced in its cover, it was carried among the congregation to be touched and hand kissed by many. But this is a gesture of love and respect, not worship, for only God is worshiped. The service is richly

theocentric with the name of God deeply reverenced as in Jewish tradition. Even when the hymns are flashed on the wall Lord and God appear only as G-d or L-rd, which is reminiscent of the scribes' avoidance of writing the tetragrammaton (JHVH) and the origin of the use of Lord (Adonai) instead.

The atmosphere of the Baruch Hashem is that of a synagogue. The Torah scroll graces the platform (bema), scrolls with the symbols of the twelve tribes of Israel bedeck the walls, with the scroll of the lion of the tribe of Judah appropriately beside the Torah and above the bema facing the believers. Worship includes the Shema ("Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is one", etc.), the Haftarah (reading from the prophets), and a benediction. As in a synagogue the sermon (Haggadah) is at the end. The day I was present I was especially blessed to hear David Stern speak, who lives in Jerusalem and has translated the "Jewish New Testament," which some in the audience had with them even though copies of the New International Version were in the pews, the one thing truly "Gentile"!

They do not have the Lord's supper, except as part of the annual Passover Seder (meal), which of course is Messianic. While they did pass loaves of bread among those gathered, with each one breaking off a piece as it passed from hand to hand, it is not considered Communion but a kind of friendly breaking of bread.

They are a joyous congregation, really reving it up in their praise to God, clapping and crying hallelujah. A radiant joy permeated the place. Some danced in the aisles by two's, three's, and four's, and about a dozen joined hands in a snake dance up and down all the aisles, as if at a Jewish festival. But it was not "Charismatic" in the sense of tongue-speaking. Some did praise God from their seats in Hebrew, but that is not an unknown tongue to them.

David Stern is a fellow rabbi with Joe Shulam in the Messianic community in Jerusalem. Joe, a Jew by birth, works among Churches of Christ and was recently at the ACU Lectures. When I had a word with David after his presentation, in which he reviewed the difficulties Messianic Jews have in Israel, he told me he agreed with some things about the "Restoration Movement" and strongly disagreed with other things. I told him that while we did not have time to discuss it then, that he and I would probably disagree on the same things. I am confident that he would agree with the exceptions I have taken in this journal to the idea of "the true restored church" based upon a contrived blueprint or pattern in the New Testament, which is basic to restorationism. I would like for David to know that those who launched our Movement did not believe that.

Our Messianic Jewish brethren point out that God does not want people divided into Jews and Christians. They see themselves as a uniting force between this division, for they are 100% Jewish and 100% Messianic. They point out that Christian theology is often anti-Semitic, such as in "replacement theology" where the church is seen as replacing Israel. They witness to unbelieving Jews from the Jewish Scriptures themselves, proving from the "Old Testament" (they don't call

it that!) that Yeshua is the Messiah, such as referring to "the Prophet like unto Moses" in Dt. 18:15, the New Covenant in Jer. 31:31, and the Suffering Servant in Is. 53:4-5. One of their tracts says, "We have not sought to bring the Jewish people into Christendom, but into true Judaism." Messianic Judaism is thus the true Judaism. They are the "completed" Jews. It is apparent that thy have a great love for the Israeli nation. At one point in the service many hands went up when they were asked if they desired to migrate to Israel. They encourage migration to Israel, believing this is the fulfillment of Scripture. They quote Scripture to the effect that all nations that oppose Israel will suffer terrible retribution (Zech. 14:12), while those who help her will be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

They practice the usual Jewish traditions, giving them a Messianic meaning. There is, for instance, a Messianic Bar Mitzvah (ceremony celebrating a Jewish boy's reaching age of responsibility at13). They are presently preparing for their annual Pesach Seder (Passover Supper), which points to Yeshua as the Lamb given by God to atone for sin. They observe all the Jewish feasts, practice circumcision, and keep the Sabbath day holy, but not for atonement. Only through faith in God's Messiah are sins atoned for. They are immersionists, often referring to themselves as "immersed believers" and "born again Jews."

One of their tracts says: "Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus) was sent by God to be the atoning sacrfice for the sins of Israel and of all mankind. God has promised to bring about the restoration and redemption of the scattered sheep of Israel." They see themselves as "the remnant" that God has preserved to bring his people Israel to repentance and to faith in the Messiah. While eminently Messianic, their worship is directed to God more than to the Messiah, who is depicted as God's atoning one, as in this hymn drawn from Scripture:

To him who sits on the throne
And unto the Lamb,
Be blessing and glory
And honor and power,
Forever.

Such lines will be sung over and over, perhaps eight or ten times, with feeling, fervor, and gusto. While they have neither piano nor organ, they do use violin and guitar. There is no printed "Order of Worship" and no hymns are announced. The singing, praising, readings, dancing, and prayers flow spontaneously.

The Baruch Hashem is an autonomous congregation that has affiliation with the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations, an association of scores of congregations nationwide. There are many Messianic congregations all over the world, including several in Israel.

The Messianic Jews are not unmindful of the contribution they can make to Gentile Christianity. They talk about helping us to understand what God's plan is

for the Gentiles in reference to Israel. They like to quote Is. 49:22: "I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and they shall bring thy sons in their arms."

Beside whatever this may mean, they can cause us to see more keenly our own Jewish roots, including the Jewishness of Jesus, and they can give us deeper insights into the Old Testament. We can begin all this by a mutual recognition that we are already one in the Messiah, despite our vast cultural and traditional differences. This is what impressed me the most about my visit, as is true with most all churches I visit: how much alike we are in spite of our differences. Those Jews in Dallas worship the same God that we worship and they follow the same Jesus that we follow. Their service on Saturday and ours on Sunday may seem worlds apart, but in the eyes of God it may well be a further fulfillment of "Christ himself is our peace, who made both Jews and Gentiles one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us" (Eph. 2:14). I can joyfully worship with my Jewish sisters and brothers because they believe in and love the same Lord that I believe in and love. What do I care whether he is called Yeshua (Joshua) or Jesus?

Let's pray that Messianic Judaism will flourish around the world, helping to bring Israel and all peoples to repentance toward God and faith toward Yeshua as the Messiah and the Savior of all mankind. — *the Editor*

DOES THE CHURCH HAVE A PATTERN?

See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you in the mountain. —Heb. 8:5

This passage has long been a prooftext for the doctrine that the church of the New Testament, like the tabernacle of the Old Testament (which is what the above verse refers to) is to be built according to a detailed pattern or blueprint. And that pattern or blueprint is the New Testament. This view has been set forth in many Church of Christ sermons with some such title as "Building According to the Pattern." The Christian Churches have also been given to this kind of thinking, with no less a luminary than P. H. Welshimer choosing to preach on "A Twentieth-Century Church on a First-Century Pattern," as he did as early as the 1928 North American Christian Convention.

I believe that this interpretation is untenable and indefensible, and one that has worked havoc among us in that it has contributed to division after division. Our umpteen parties within the Movement are due in part to what might be called "patternistic theology." Once we assume that the New Testament is a prescribed pattern, with all the details of name, organization, work, and worship of the church

spelled out, then it follows that all congregations must be alike, believing alike and conforming to the same prescription. Add to this the fact that each "wing commander" among us has his own idea of what the right pattern is and you have the making for more debates and more divisions.

The logic is as flawless as it is severe: If the New Testament is the blueprint for the church and I read the blueprint aright, then my view of the church is the right one and all others must line up with the way I see it. This leads to the "only true church" mentality, and again the logic is unerring, for if I correctly read the pattern my church is right and yours is wrong. No diversity allowed! This is why we have divided over such matters as Sunday schools, choirs, instrumental music, societies, sponsoring churches, lesson leaves, and even whether we can eat in the church building or have a Christmas tree. It is assumed that the New Testament, as the church's pattern, legislates in all such matters in one way or another.

This patternism has given rise to the so-called "law of silence," which means that if the New Testament is silent regarding the thing in question it is disallowed. If there is such a "law" it is one that has to be obeyed with much selectivity, for there is no way that we can reject everything about which the New Testament is silent. The list of things concerning which the Bible is silent is virtually endless, but no party among us selects more than a few of them to be tests of fellowship. A case in point is a recent exchange in the *Christian Chronicle*, a Church of Christ news journal. The editor suggested that our congregations might do well to have an occasional choral presentation along with congregational singing. In response to this the editor of another journal wrote and asked for book, chapter, and verse for a choir. It so happens that said editor is high on lectureships, for his name is usually among the featured speakers. And where does the Bible talk about lectureships?

We can resolve this hermeneutical problem only by some hard, honest thinking. Is the New Testament really the kind of book that we are making it? If it is a detailed pattern, like unto the instructions God gave Moses for the building of the tabernacle, why are there such differences in interpretation? If it is as "clear" and "easy" as we make it out to be, why do we stand alone in many of our conclusions? There are not differences like that over the recipe for a chocolate cake? The fact is that the New Testament bears no resemblance to a recipe, pattern, or blueprint — because their prescriptive nature allow for no differences of opinion.

And where does the New Testament make any such claim for itself? The prooftext cited above is referring to the tabernacle in the wilderness, regarding which Moses was given precise detail, including the exact measurements for the curtains and the design of the priests' garments. Where is there anything in the New Testament that even remotely suggests that it is to be such a pattern as that for the church through all the centuries?

Too, Moses was given the pattern for the tabernacle prior to the building of it, and with such instructions in hand he proceeded to built it. Is that the way the early

churches were set up? There is not a congregation mentioned in the New Testament that had the New Testament for its pattern, for the New Testament was not written, canonized, and circulated until hundreds of years later. How could the New Testament have been the pattern for the first Churches of Christ when they had no such book?

Hard, honest thinking will convince us that "going by the New Testament" is not as simple as we have made it. We would have no problem if the New Testament were indeed a pattern like the one given to Moses, just as it was no problem to Moses. He knew exactly down to the last detail what God wanted, and so he responsed to the warning and "built all things according to the pattern." It is not that way with us and the New Testament. Even with the New Testament in hand we cannot always be sure exactly what we should do — and so the New Testament lends itself to varying interpretations. Do we have "pattern theology" on such issues as military service, euthanasia, genetic engineering, birth control, the death penalty, trade relations?

And if it is setting up a church how about having trustees, owning property, erecting edifices, building baptistries, setting up a corporation — and precisely how is a congregation to be organized? On all these matters the New Tesatament may lay down principles, and there is some information, but there is obviously nothing even resembling a spelled-out agenda. The New Testament is far more descriptive (of the life and faith of the early believers) than it is prescriptive.

Bold thinking forces us to ask how ancient documents, however inspired they may be, composed under such volatile and varying circumstances, are to be interpreted and applied to the ongoing life of the church, century after century. Is there any evidence in those documents that we call the New Testament that the church in all succeeding generations is to do precisely as the first century church did, if indeed this can be correctly ascertained? Or is it that in the experience of the early believers as revealed in the New Testament we are motivated to do for our generation what they did for theirs — but not necessarily in exactly the same way? If they washed each other's feet, for example, which was appropos to that generation but not to ours, I might do my neighbor's yard for him.

To assume that the New Testament is a detailed pattern for the church for all ages is to be confronted with insurmountable difficulties. According to Acts 4 the church at Jerusalem practiced a kind of communism in that each one sold his possessions and placed the proceeds in care of the apostles, "and they distributed to each as anyone had need" (verse 35). This is what the first-century church did. Would brother Welshimer, who wanted the twentieth-century church to be built upon the first-century pattern, want his Christian Church in Ohio to do as the first Christian Church in Jerusalem did?

That same Jerusalem church, with the apostles and elders in charge, issued a letter to the Gentile churches in which they set forth a list of four "necessary things"

that they were to do or not do. One of the essentials was that they were to abstain from things strangled, that is non-kosher food (Acts 15:20). Why does that letter not apply to the Gentile churches today if Biblical patternism is the correct hermenutics? Could Moses pick and choose when he was warned to build the tabernacle according to the pattern?

Numerous things in the New Testament may be accounted for on the basis of cultural influence, whether it be foot washing, the holy kiss, the wearing of a veil, hair styles, or the role of women, and so we should feel free to make changes according to our own culture, while preserving the spirit of these instructions. But if the New Testament is a pattern to be followed precisely, we are stuck with all these ancient customs, such as the fact that some five times the New Testament says, "Salute one another with a holy kiss."

The place of women in New Testament times is a fitting instance of how pattern theology gets us in trouble. The apostle Paul in his cultural setting saw it appropriate to regulate the woman's dress and hair style, that she would wear a veil in the assembly, that she was not to speak in church, and that she should be submissive to man. It is highly unlikely that Paul would say the same things to the churches today, especially to those in the Western world where the woman is for the most part liberated from those antiquated prejudices that denied her personhood.

Paul's instructions to Timothy about widows further points this up. According to 1 Tim. 5:9 Paul did not want a woman "enrolled as a widow," which means to be supported by the church, if she were younger than 60. He goes on to speak of the younger widows, and these he wanted married, barefooted, and pregnant, or words to that effect. While such notions may have fit those times, it would be foolish to make such instructions a pattern for all ages and cultures. In our culture widows do not have to be maintained by the church. They can go to work, which they could not do in Paul's day, and they probably have insurance and Social Security.

But when a church today does find it necessary to help widows financially, perhaps by giving them a church job (which is close to what Paul was talking about), do we have to turn down a widow who is only 58 or 59? We even feel free to employ a 35-year old widow and think nothing of it. Wherever Paul came up with his "threescore years", we seem to have no problem ignoring it. But if that is part of a divine and detailed pattern that we are warned to heed to the letter, then what? Paul also says that such widows are to have washed the saints feet. That one really does thin out the ranks! This points well to the vast cultural differences between their culture and our own, and it underscores the impossibility of pattern hermeneutics.

What then is our pattern? It is the same pattern that Peter, James, and John had and all the churches of the Bible — Jesus Christ himself! The invitation that Jesus issued to his disciples is ours also: "Come, follow me." This is the pattern that is often referred to in the New Testament, such as Philip. 2:5, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," and 1 Pet. 2:21, "To this were you called, because

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." The God of heaven did indeed give a pattern to his people, but it was a Person and not a book or an array of documents, and that Person is after his own likeness. This means that ultimately God is our pattern, as Paul recognizes in Eph. 5:1, "Be followers of God as dear children." Jesus shows us the way to God. He is God's interpreter (Jn. 1:18).

This means that the New Testament, indeed all of Scripture, may be viewed as our pattern to the degree that it reveals Christ to us. Our interpretation of Scripture should always be in reference to Christ. Jesus Christ *is* the law and the prophets, the essence of all that they mean. That is how Jesus himself saw the Old Covenant Scriptures — "They testify of Me," he said in Jn. 5:39.

As we look for a more responsible hermeneutics I would suggest we start where Alexander Campbell started: *Interpret the Bible the same way we interpret any other book, according to laws of common sense.* Except that I would add, *and in reference to the Spirit of Christ.*

By a "Spirit of Christ" rule of interpretation I mean that we should disallow any understanding of Scripture that compromises or contradicts the Spirit of Christ. If we interpret verses, for instance, in a way that relegate women to an unequal place in the Christian community, that interpretation must be suspect, for it is contrary to the Spirit of Christ that liberates women and makes them equal. If we use the Bible to sever fellowship between sisters and brothers in Christ and make them suspicious of each other rather than to love and accept each other, we must question such a use of the Bible. Even when one quotes endless prooftexts, if he uses them in a sectarian and mean-spirited way, he is abusing the Bible rather than properly interpreting it, however "right" he may appear to be.

What then is the New Testament if not a pattern of the sort given to Moses for the tabernacle? It is part of Holy Scripture and is to be esteemed as such, and like all Scripture "It is profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16). But it must be interpreted responsibly, and patternistic hermeneutics is not responsible, to which our dozens of parties bear witness. We are to read the New Testament so as to be brought closer to God by being brought nearer to Christ, and this should be our rule. Nothing else really matters.

One line from the New Testament illustrates my point: "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three, and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Whatever the question may be in our study of the New Testament, if our interpretation has no relevance to faith, hope, or love, which is the essence of the Spirit of Christ, we can forget it, for it does not abide. That says it all. The "abiding interpretation" is that which points to the Spirit of Christ in terms of faith, hope, and love. All else is useless opinion. *—the Editor*

Heroes and Reformers of History...No. 4

JOHN BUNYAN: CAPTIVE OF THE WORD

Back in 1874 an impressive bronze statue, standing 10 feet tall and weighing almost three tons, was erected in Bedford, England. The occasion was one of the most celebrated in the town's long history. Thousands of dignitaries from all over England gathered for the festive occasion. In view of the one being honored by the erection of the statue, it was fitting that 4,000 school children were there to help celebrate. A reporter figured that the children consumed over a ton of cake and 600 gallons of tea! The adults were lavishly entertained in the ballroom of a local hotel.

The statue is of "a very grave person," a minister of the gospel who stands bold and erect with an open Bible in his hands and a cape about his shoulders. The pedestal, which almost doubles the height of the statue, has these words engraved upon it:

He had eyes uplifted to heaven;
The best of books in his hand;
The law of truth was written
Upon his lips . . .
He stood as if he pleaded
With men.

A broken chain lay at his feet symbolizing his long imprisonment and his struggle to be free to preach the gospel to his fellow Englishmen. Three sides of the pedestal depict scenes from "Pilgrim's Progress," which he authored, one of which shows Pilgrim released from his load and angels pointing him to the Celestial city.

The name engraved below the statue is simply: *John Bunyan.*

Whether intended or not, the direction that the statue faces may say more than anything else about it. Bunyan's back is to the elegant St. Peter's Church, which stands in the background as a symbol of Anglicanism and the established church that dogged John Bunyan most of his life, a humble tinker whose only crime was that he preached the gospel when it was against the law to do so.

Even if he made a scarce living for his family by mending pots and pans, he became one of the most gifted and illustrious writers England ever produced. While he wrote scores of pamphlets, tracts, and books, he is known in history for writing the most famous of all English books, the full title of which gives witness to his strong Puritan faith: *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come.* It has sold millions of copies, has been translated into 108 languages, and in its first century of life went through 59 editions, which places it second only to the Bible in all-time circulation. While it is not all that popular in the 20th century, in early America it was present in most every home.

It is ironical that thousands would gather in Bedford to honor John Bunyan and erect a statue made in his likeness, for it was in that same English town that he spent a large part of his life in prison, rejected and despised as a criminal, at least by the powers that be. But almost two centuries had passed since Bunyan had died in 1688, and England had changed. Now he was a hero and author of England's greatest literary work, surpassing anything done even by Shakespeare. The vicissitudes of history are amazing! Bunyan could little imagine back in 1678-84, the years he wrote his famous work while in jail, that the time would come when one could look out his cell window and see a monument erected in his honor and scenes from *Pilgrim* engraved in stone. And he was but a lowly tinker! Never sell a person short who has God on his or her side.

In the England of Bunyan's day no one could preach the gospel unless he was an ordained priest in the Church of England. Because of the Puritan revolution the authorities had closed all churches except those of the Anglican faith. It was against the law to attend any service except those of the state church, and one could be fined or imprisoned for not attending those services. Secret gatherings were illegal. These were the days when John Locke, the Christian philosopher that we have included in this series, was urging tolerance toward all dissenters, even though he was himself an Anglican. He insisted that one sure mark of the true church is tolerance.

Nonetheless, under King Charles II, who broke his promise to allow religious liberty, many dissenters were fined, pilloried, and imprisoned, and some were executed. These included such new sects as Presbyterians, Quakers, and Baptists, as well as the Puritans who were seeking to reform the Anglican church from within. It was the Pilgrims, separatists from the mother church, who, because of persecution, came to America for the sake of religious freedom and set up the Plymouth colony in 1620. That was only eight years before John Bunyan was born in Eltow, near Bedford, of what he called "the meanest and most despised of all families in the land."

Bunyan tells how he grew up committing those sins particularly disallowed by the Puritans, such as dancing, card playing, and drinking ale in the tavern. In lying and blaspheming he says he had no equals. He lived in fear of God's wrath. At 16 he was drafted into England's Civil War, but as a soldier he sinned even more and became more rebellious against God. At about 19 he married an orphan girl. He prospered at his humble trade, began going to church, and one by one abandoned the sins of his youth. He became deeply religious and read the Bible daily, the simple English of which became his writing style.

But his faith had its doubts, as to whether there really is a God and as to whether being a Christian is not a geographical accident. Had he been born among the Turks he would have been a disciple of Mohomet, he supposed. And perhaps the Bible is more fable than the word of God.

One day as he walked in the countryside all his doubts vanished as his mind dwelt upon one line from the apostle Paul, "He hath made peace by the blood of His cross." The realization that Christ had died for him turned his life around. He was baptized by immersion, joined the Baptist church, and was eventually ordained to preach. His message was that of the apostle Paul, "Jesus Christ and him crucified," with sin, grace, and redemption his constant themes. But to Bunyan God was a God of wrath and judgment as well as a God of grace and forgiveness. Historians esteem him as one of the great preachers of his time.

When the old law forbidding non-Anglicans to preach was revived in 1660, Bunyan complied to the extent of closing his chapel, but he and his disciples went underground and he continued to preach. He was arrested but was offered release if he would promise not to preach. He explained that he was called of God to preach and could not do otherwise. He was imprisoned in a Bedford jail for six years. When he was freed he was warned not to preach, lest he again be arrested. To charge Bunyan not to preach was like telling the wind not to blow or the stars not to shine. He was God's man, and like Paul, "Woe be unto me if I preach not the gospel." He was imprisoned for six more years.

Now and again during his imprisonment he was offered his freedom if he would not preach. He would always say, "If you let me out today I will preach tomorrow." In all this he was such a sweet and reasonable guy that he gained the respect and favor of the jailers. Like Paul the prisoner before him, he was allowed to preach to fellow prisoners and people who sought his counsel were allowed easy access to his cell. He was also allowed to make and market lace, which helped to support his destitute wife and four children. He was even allowed to leave the jail at will, sometimes traveling as far as London, but when he resumed his clandestine preaching on his brief furloughs he was placed under greater restriction. He became an inveterate reader, reading the Bible over and over, along with Fox's *Book of Martyrs* .

And he was always free to write and was furnished all the paper he wanted. Like Luther a century before him, he turned out pamphlet after pamphlet, and one major work, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners,* which was autobiographical.

The proscription against preaching would occasionally be lifted for a time and Bunyan would be freed. He would return to his old Bedford church as pastor during such times, only to be arrested again. It was during his last term in prison that he wrote *Pilgrim,* which was several years in the writing. Like the "Prison Epistles" of Paul, it is a blessing that would be denied us had John Bunyan not been confined to jail again and again. God does his work among us, and his ways often amaze us. And we must be careful what we call adversity.

Some touching stories are told relative to Bunyan's imprisonment. His impoverished wife would go before the judges pleading for her husband's release so that he could support his family of four children, one of which was blind. Moved by her humility and tenderness, they would seek to respond to her plea. They would

ask if she could keep her husband from preaching, to which she would say that was an impossible demand, for preach John Bunyan must. His little blind daughter was allowed to visit him often. She would run her hands across her fathers face to see if there were tears, and if so she would kiss them away.

A few years back I read large portions of *Pilgrim's Progress* to Mother Pitts, my wife's aged mother who lives with us, back when she was able to follow the story. Together we followed Christian as he left home on his journey to the Celestial city, willing to make any sacrifice in his search for Christ and Paradise. We listened as he was joined by the likes of Hopeful, Mercy, Faithful, Evangelist, Pliable, and Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, who struggle triumphantly. But then there was Poor Ignorance, who never quite got his faith together and was bundled off to hell when he knocked on the Celestial door without a passport! Adversaries include Giant Despair and Worldly Wiseman, and there are such obstacles as the City of Destruction, Valley of the Shadow, Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle, and the Slough of Despond.

Mother Pitts, who was then in her late 80's, had a twinkle of hope in her eyes when I read how Mr. Valiant-for-Truth gave his farewell to those who were still struggling toward the City. "I am going to my fathers," he said, "and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am." Valiant leaves his sword with those who follow after him, and then says, "My marks and scars I carry with me to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who will now be my rewarder." The day came for him to pass over the river to the Celestial city. As he crossed the others could hear him cry out with joy, "O death where is thy sting," and still later more faintly in the distance, "O grave, where is thy victory." As he passed over the river the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

He who wrote that engaging story was at last freed from prison for good when King Charles II issued his Declaration of Indulgence. So John Bunyan freely preached the last few years of his life. He also worked for unity among his scattered people. On one such mission of peace he was wetted down in a severe storm from which he contracted a fever that took his life at age 60.

They buried him near his birthplace in Bunhills Fields in the cemetery of the Dissenters. Where else would you bury John Bunyan except in a Dissenter's grave? But in Bedford town he lives on, standing 18 feet tall in noble bronze. His hand is upon the Scriptures, his face is turned toward heaven, at his feet lay the shackles that could not confine him, and his back is turned against all forms of oppression, bigotry, and sectarianism. And as far away as Elstow, where he played as a boy with no idea of what God had in store for him, it seems that you can still hear him preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, with none forbidding him. In *Pilgrim's Progress* John Bunyan told his own story and described his own victory. — *the Editor*

IS IT OK TO WONDER?

Cecil Hook

I wonder if you and I wonder about the same things. Let's compare. Here are some things that I wonder about as my mind wanders.

I wonder why that, in Bible class art work for children, we never see any dinosaurs entering the ark with the other animals.

I wonder why we have no interview with Lazarus after his being raised from the dead.

I wonder if a preacher or an elder would still be qualified after a sex change operation.

I wonder why a woman can write out an announcement for a man to read in the assembly but cannot read it herself.

I wonder how all that fossil fuel could have gotten underground in the Middle East without disturbing the topography with which the Garden of Eden is identified.

I wonder why the Spirit would say "about twenty-five or thirty furlongs." Didn't he know the exact distance? (Jn. 6:19)

I wonder how the kangaroos got from the ark to Australia and why they suppressed their reproductive instincts till they got there, leaving no progeny in other parts of the route.

I wonder, if man had been six-fingered, would we have arrived at six steps of salvation and six acts of worship?

I wonder why, instead of asking God to give the preacher "a ready recollection of the things he has prepared," we don't pray rather that God would give him something of depth and relevance to say, even if has to depend upon his own memory and notes in delivering it.

I wonder if, presuming that it is sinful for a woman to teach a man, when a woman prophesied by the Spirit, she sinned if she ever revealed to men what she prophesied.

I wonder why we have no biography of Jesus written by Mary.

I wonder what the residents of San Antonio were doing while the Battle of the Alamo was being fought.

I wonder why the old folk who wish they could go ahead and die so as to be with the Lord are usually so careful that they hardly give the Lord a chance to take them.

I wonder if humming of spiritual songs is singing or playing, or is it neither, being a separate "act of worship." And, is it the tune that is spiritual or the words, or is it the thought and feelings which they nurture that are spiritual worship?

I wonder if ancient people ordinarily talked in poetic form like Job and the other characters in *Job* did. Or, were they all inspired by the Spirit to speak poetically? If so, were not all their expressions inspired messages from God rather than their own thoughts?

I wonder where Adam got the tools with which to dress the Garden of Eden. Would "necessary inference" demand either that God made them for him, that Adam invented tools, or that they had hardware stores then? And I wonder, if the father of the race had tools, how do we account for the fact that certain tribes of his descendents did not have them later on?

I wonder if a faithful Christian who lost his identity through amnesia and lived a sinful life in his new identity would be saved or lost.

I wonder why God made such an incomprehensibly vast universe when such an infinitesimal part of it would be inhabited by man or serve his needs.

I wonder what we mean when we sing, "My life will end in deathless sleep where the soul of man never dies."

I wonder why undenominational churches always become undenominational denominations.

I wonder what God had in mind when he made Utah.

I wonder why the Holy Spirit did not organize his material better when giving it to men.

I wonder why the Holy Spirit did not give us one "book" on each of the subjects of worship, elders, women, marriage, divorce, etc., listing all applicable rules, regulations, specifications, and restrictions.

I wonder why God made some snakes to be poisonous and others not.

I wonder why our super-scrupulous people will include a song in our hymnals which has no spiritual connotation in it — "Precious Memories."

I wonder why a reformer is a saintly prophet if I agree with him but a fanatical heretic if I disagree with him.

I wonder why God does not reveal his will to each of us individually so that all may have a common understanding and equal opportunity.

As we sing of our God being beyond the azure blue, I wonder if we are really trusting that he is in, with, and about us at all times.

I wonder why preachers are seldom invited back for guest appearances in the congregation with which they formerly worked.

I wonder why the Lord does not always put the desire to preach and the ability to do so in the same men.

I wonder why the Lord lets us do our most energetic work while we know the least and then lets maturity be taken away by old age

I wonder what the carnivorous animal ate on the ark.

I wonder that God would let most people be born in this life through natural instinct or lust instead of purposeful desire by our parents.

I wonder when I shall meet that person who is "satisfied with just a cottage below, a little silver and a little gold."

You have been psychoanalyzing me by noting the things that cause me to wonder. I wonder what your diagnosis is! — *1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130*

OUR CHANGING WORLD

Ouida has been busy this past month working with the post office on changing our mailing permit from second class to third class. She opted for this change not only because it is now more economical for us, but mainly because it simplifies record keeping and mailing procedures. Even though we have mailed second class for 37 years, the postal officials advised that third class might now be better for our operation, and they assure us that the quality of handling will be no different, but you might receive your paper a day or so later than before. We are at least going to try it. We can return to second class if need be. My health is virtually back to normal since my radical prostatectomy on Jan. 3 (I walk two miles each morning as if I were Superman), but I have not yet returned to Houston for the final tests. I greatly appreciate your prayers and concern.

The film on the life of Alexander Campbell, *Wrestling With God,* now and again referred to in this column during its preparation, is now a reality. Ouida and I have seen it on our VCR and we found it delightful. It made us proud to be Campbellites. It is one hour and ten minutes long. The acting, costuming, and photography are all profesionally done, and it catches the essence of Campbell the man and the reformer. But his wife Margaret nearly steals the show. Super! It deserves an Oscar! I was pleased to have served as an adviser in the making of it, which took five years. Here is something you can use for years to come in blessing others. After July 1 it will be available from a distributor for $79.95. Until then you can purchase it from the producers for $59.95 plus $3.00 postage, a real bargain believe me. Order from *Wrestling With God,* Box 761, North Hollywood, Ca. 91603.

During the 1980's the Disciples of Christ established 132 new congregations. To such fast-growing denominations as the Pentecostals that may not be an impressive figure, but for a mainline Protestant denomination that is supposed to be dying it is impressive. Their goal for the 1990's is 200 new churches. We hope that the Lord so blesses them that they end the decade with twice that many.

In Uganda, Africa it is estimated that 25% of the male population between the ages of 16 and 40 are infected with the AIDS virus. More than 6,000 cases have already been documented, which is believed to be only a fraction of the actual cases. But what is unusual about Uganda is that the victims are not shunned but embraced with unconditional, sacrifical love and tenderness. This has impressed missionaries working there as an example of compassion for the rest of the world.

Episcopalians in the U. S. for years have had serious problems over the ordination of women, with at least one separate group formed in protest to the practice. Recently in Philadelphia the House of Bishops, made up of 182 Episcopalian bishops, issued a statement calling for unity in the worldwide Anglican communion despite differences over the issue. At the same time the bishops affirmed the ministry of a black woman bishop, the first female bishop in the whole world of Anglicanism.

There is a new book out that tells teachers how to survive the violence in today's public school classroom. The book notes that 157,000 crimes occur in U.S. schools in a typical month. We have our work cut out for us, don't we, each of us in her own community.

The World Bible Translation Center, a Church of Christ outreach in Ft. Worth, Tx., recently sent 17,000 of its newly-translated Easy-to-Read Russian New Testaments to Soviet citizens. The Center has arranged for the printing and distribution of 100,000 copies of the New Testament inside Russia.